

What is claimed is:

1. In a hearing amplification device adapted to receive a sound signal, the hearing amplification device having at least one channel configured to receive an input representative of said sound signal, the improvement comprising:

5 said channel being further configured to provide (1) linear gain for an input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level less than a compression threshold, (2) rapid compressive gain for an input
 10 representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level greater than said compression threshold, wherein said rapid compressive gain is less than said linear gain, and (3) adaptive control of said compression threshold.

2. The hearing amplification device of claim 1 wherein said at least one channel is further configured to provide said rapid compressive gain as instantaneous compressive gain.

3. The hearing amplification device of claim 2 wherein said at least one channel is further configured to adjust said compression threshold at least partially in response to changes in said sound signal.

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4. The hearing amplification device of claim 3 wherein said at least one channel is configured to have its compression threshold initially set to a predetermined quiescent level, and wherein said at least channel is
 5 further configured to adjust said compression threshold such that said compression threshold is in a range of about said predetermined quiescent level to about 20 decibels below an

10. The hearing amplification device of claim 8 wherein said at least one channel is further configured to provide attenuation for an input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level greater than an attenuation threshold, said attenuation threshold being greater than said decompression threshold.

12. The hearing amplification device of claim 2 wherein said at least one channel is further configured to adjust said compression threshold at least partially in response to a user input.

14. The hearing amplification device of claim 13 wherein each channel is configured to have its compression threshold initially set independently of each other channel, and wherein each channel is further configured to adjust its compression threshold at least partially in response to changes in said sound signal.

15. The hearing amplification device of claim 14 wherein each channel is configured to independently adjust its compression threshold at least partially in response to changes in said sound signal.

16. The hearing amplification device of claim 14 wherein each channel is further configured to provide (1) constant gain for an input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level greater than a decompression threshold, said decompression threshold being greater than said compression threshold, said constant gain being less than said compressive gain, and (2) instantaneous compressive gain which converges to said constant gain for increasing sound levels.

17. The hearing amplification device of claim 16 wherein each channel is configured to have its compression threshold initially set to a predetermined quiescent level, and wherein each channel is further configured to adjust its compression threshold such that its compression threshold is in a range of about its predetermined quiescent level to about said decompression threshold.

18. The hearing amplification device of claim 17 wherein each channel is further configured to adjust its compression threshold such that its compression threshold is in a range of about said predetermined quiescent level to about 20 decibels below an average sound level of at least a portion of said sound signal.

19. The hearing amplification device of claim 17 wherein each channel is configured to adjust its compression threshold such that its compression threshold is within a

range of about 5 decibels below an average sound level of at
5 least a portion of said sound signal to about 5 decibels
above said average sound level.

20. A method of compensating for impaired hearing, said
method comprising:

linearly amplifying an input corresponding to a
portion of a sound signal having a sound level less than a
5 compression threshold;

rapidly compressively amplifying an input
corresponding to a portion of a sound signal having a sound
level greater than said compression threshold, and

adaptively controlling said compression threshold at
10 least partially in response to changes in said sound signal.

21. The method of claim 20 wherein said rapidly
compressively amplifying step includes instantaneously
compressively amplifying an input corresponding to a portion
of a sound signal having a sound level greater than said
5 compression threshold.

22. The method of claim 21 further comprising:

initially setting said compression threshold at a
predetermined quiescent level;

storing a previously determined peak value for a
5 previous portion of said sound signal;

determining a current peak value for a current portion
of said sound signal; and

wherein said adaptively controlling step includes
instantly increasing said compression threshold when said
10 determined current peak value is greater than said stored
peak value.

maintaining said compression threshold at its current level when said determined current peak value does not deviate by more than a predetermined triggering amount from said stored peak value; and

24. The method of claim 23 wherein said decreasing step includes:

25. The method of claim 24 wherein said adaptively controlling step further includes:

5 setting a minimum value for said compression
threshold;

10 wherein said instantly adjusting step includes
increasing said compression threshold to substantially match
said estimated average sound level when said estimated
average sound level is less than or equal to said maximum
value and increasing said compression threshold to equal
15 said maximum value when said estimated average sound level
is greater than said maximum value; and

wherein said decreasing step includes decreasing said compression threshold by a fixed amount when said compression threshold minus said fixed amount would not be less than said minimum value and decreasing said compression threshold to equal said minimum value when said compression threshold minus said fixed amount would be less than said minimum value.

26. The method of claim 25 further comprising:

providing constant gain for an input corresponding to a portion of a sound signal having a sound level greater than a decompression threshold, wherein said decompression threshold is greater than said compression threshold, said constant gain being less than said compressive gain, and wherein said instantaneous compressive amplification converges to said constant gain for increasing sound levels.

27. The method of claim 26 wherein said step of setting said maximum value includes setting said maximum value as said decompression threshold, and wherein said step of setting said minimum value includes setting said minimum value as said predetermined quiescent level.

28. The method of claim 21 further comprising:

providing constant gain for an input corresponding to a portion of a sound signal having a sound level greater than a decompression threshold, wherein said decompression threshold is greater than said compression threshold, said constant gain being less than said compressive gain, and wherein said instantaneous compressive amplification converges to said constant gain for increasing sound levels.

29. The method of claim 28 further comprising:

attenuating an input corresponding to a portion of a sound signal having a sound level greater than an attenuation threshold, wherein said attenuation threshold is greater than said decompression threshold.

30. The method of claim 21 further comprising:
performing each of said steps for a plurality of different audio frequency ranges.

31. The method of claim 21 further comprising providing a smooth transition between said linear amplification and said instantaneous compressive amplification.

32. The method of claim 21 further comprising providing a sharp transition between said linear amplification and said instantaneous compressive amplification.

33. A nonlinear hearing amplification device adapted to receive and amplify a sound signal, said device comprising:

a transducer for processing a transducer input according to a transfer function to thereby produce a transducer output, said transducer input being representative of a sound signal, said transducer output being representative of an amplified sound signal, said transfer function being configured to provide (1) linear gain for a transducer input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level less than a compression threshold, and (2) rapid compressive gain for a transducer input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level greater than said compression threshold, wherein said rapid compressive gain is less than said linear gain; and

39. The device of claim 35 wherein said transfer function is further configured to provide a sharp transition between said linear gain and said instantaneous compressive gain.

40. The device of claim 35 wherein an asymptotic representation of said transfer function TA_1 is defined by the general formula:

$$TA = TA(u, A, U, p),$$

5 wherein for $|u| < U$:

$$TA(u, A, U, p) = Au$$

wherein for $|u| > U$

$$TA(u, A, U, p) = \text{sgn}(u)AU \left| \frac{u}{U} \right|^p$$

wherein:

$$TA_1 = TA_1(u, U_c) = TA(u, A(U_c), U_c(Y), p);$$

10 wherein $U_c(Y) = U_1$ for Y less than U_1 and $U_c(Y) = Y$ for Y greater than or equal to U_1 , wherein U_1 represents a quiescent level for said compression threshold, wherein U_c represents an adjusted compression threshold, wherein Y represents a control signal from said controller for
15 controlling said compression threshold, wherein u represents said transducer input, wherein p represents a compression power, and wherein A represents a magnitude of gain, wherein for Y less than U_1 :

$$A = G_1$$

and wherein for Y greater than or equal to U_1 :

$$A = G_1 \left| \frac{U_1}{U_c} \right|^{1-p}$$

20 wherein G_1 represents the magnitude of said linear gain.

41. The device of claim 35 wherein said transfer function is further configured to provide constant gain for a

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wherein for $|u| < U$:

wherein for $|u| > u$

wherein:

wherein $U_c(Y) = U_1$ for Y less than U_1 , $U_c(Y) = Y$ for Y greater than or equal to U_1 and less than or equal to U_2 , and $U_c(Y) = U_2$ for Y greater than U_2 , wherein U_1 represents a quiescent level for said compression threshold, wherein U_2

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and wherein for Y greater than or equal to U_1 :

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wherein G_1 represents the magnitude of said linear gain; and
 wherein for $TA_2=TA_2(u)=TA(u,1,U_2,p_2)$, wherein u
 25 represents TA_1 , wherein U_2 represents said decompression
 threshold, and wherein p_2 represents $1/p_1$.

43. The device of claim 41 wherein said transfer function
 is further configured to provide attenuation for a
 transducer input representative of a portion of said sound
 signal having a sound level greater than an attenuation
 5 threshold, wherein said attenuation threshold is greater
 than said decompression threshold.

44. The device of claim 43 wherein an asymptotic
 representation of said transfer function is defined as a
 cascade of three functions TA_1 , TA_2 , and TA_3 , wherein TA_1 ,
 TA_2 , and TA_3 are each defined the general formula:

$$TA=TA(u,A,U,p),$$

wherein for $|u| < U$:

$$TA(u,A,U,p)=Au$$

wherein for $|u| > U$

$$TA(u,A,U,p)=\text{sgn}(u)AU\left|\frac{u}{U}\right|^p$$

wherein:

$$10 \quad TA_1=TA_1(u,U_c)=TA(u,A(U_c),U_c(Y),p_1);$$

wherein $U_c(Y)=U_1$ for Y less than U_1 , $U_c(Y)=Y$ for Y greater
 than or equal to U_1 and less than or equal to U_2 , and

$U_c(Y)=U_2$ for Y greater than U_2 , wherein U_1 represents a
 quiescent level for said compression threshold, wherein U_2
 15 represents said decompression threshold, wherein U_c
 represents an adjusted compression threshold, wherein Y
 represents a control signal from said controller for
 controlling said compression threshold, wherein u represents
 said transducer input, wherein p_1 represents a first

20 compression power, and wherein A represents a magnitude of gain, wherein for Y less than U_1 :

$$A = G_1$$

and wherein for Y greater than or equal to U_1 :

$$A = G_1 \left| \frac{U_1}{U_c} \right|^{1-p}$$

wherein G_1 represents the magnitude of said linear gain;

25 wherein for $TA2 = TA2(u) = TA(u, 1, U_2, p_2)$, wherein u represents $TA1$ or $TA3$, wherein U_2 represents said decompression threshold, and wherein p_2 represents $1/p_1$; and wherein for $TA3 = TA3(u) = TA(u, 1, U_3, p_3)$, u represents $TA1$ or $TA2$, wherein U_3 represents said attenuation threshold, and wherein p_3 represents a second compression power.

45. The device of claim 35 further comprising a plurality of said transducers and a plurality of channels, each channel being responsive to a different predetermined channel frequency range and comprising one of said
5 transducers, and wherein said controller is coupled to each of said transducers, wherein said transducer input for each transducer is representative of those frequency components of said sound signal that are within its corresponding predetermined channel frequency range.

46. The device of claim 45 wherein each of said channels and said controller are implemented in a digital signal processor, each transducer input being a digital representation of said sound signal.

47. The device of claim 46 wherein said digital signal processor is a multirate digital signal processor.

49. The device of claim 35 wherein said transducer and said controller are implemented in a digital signal processor, said transducer input being a digital representation of said sound signal.

51. The device of claim 35 wherein said transducer and said controller are implemented in a plurality of analog components.

a first operating mode in which said controller is configured to not adjust said compression threshold; and

wherein said controller is switchable between said first operating mode and said second operating mode.

a third operating mode in which said controller is configured to fix said compression threshold at a current

wherein said controller is switchable between said first operating mode, said second operating mode, and said third operating mode.

54. The device of claim 53 wherein said controller is configured to switch between said first operating mode, said second operating mode, and said third operating mode at least partially in response to a user input.

55. A hearing amplification device for producing an amplified sound signal from a received sound signal, said hearing amplification device comprising a digital signal processor configured to:

- 5 pass a first data set representative of said received sound signal through a transfer function to thereby create a second data set representative of said amplified sound signal, wherein said transfer function is configured to provide (1) linear gain for data representative of a sound signal having a sound level less than a compression threshold, (2) instantaneous compressive gain for data representative of a sound signal having a sound level greater than said compression threshold, wherein said instantaneous compressive gain is less than said linear gain; and

15 adjust said compression threshold at least partially in response to changes in said received sound signal.

56. A hearing amplification device comprising:

- a transducer for producing a transducer output from a transducer input, said transducer input being representative of a sound signal, said transducer output being produced by processing said transducer input according to a transfer function, said transfer function being configured to provide (1) linear gain for a transducer input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level less than a compression threshold, and (2) rapid compressive gain for a transducer input representative of a portion of said sound signal having a sound level greater than said compression

threshold, wherein said instantaneous compressive gain is less than said linear gain; and

15 a compression threshold controller coupled to said transducer and configured to switch said compression threshold between at least two values.

57. The hearing amplification device of claim 56 wherein said controller is configured to switch said compression threshold at least partially in response to changes in said sound signal.

58. The hearing amplification device of claim 56 wherein said controller is further configured to switch said compression threshold at least partially in response to a user input.

59. A method of diagnosing an extent and form of hearing impairment, said method comprising:

- 5 determining an amount of low level gain G_1 needed by a patient in a plurality of different audio frequency ranges for sound signals having a low sound level;
- selecting a compression power p ;
- adjusting a hearing amplifier device having a plurality of channels corresponding said audio frequency ranges to provide the determined low level gain G_1 for each
- 10 channel and selected compression power p , said hearing amplification device being configured to process an input signal representative of a sound signal according to a merging family of channel transducer characteristics to create an amplified signal, said characteristics defined by
- 15 (1) linear gain for input signals representative of a sound signal having a sound level less than a compression threshold, (2) rapid compressive gain for input signals

representative of a sound signal having a sound level greater than a compression threshold;

20 presenting a sound signal at an input of the hearing amplification device to generate an amplified signal therefrom;

 providing to the patient the amplified signal generated from said presented sound signal; and

25 adjusting the values of said compression threshold for low level gain G_1 for each channel and said compression power p until the patient communicates that he/she has perceived satisfactory results.

60. A hearing amplification device adapted to receive a sound signal, the hearing amplification device comprising:

 at least one channel configured to receive an input representative of said sound signal, said at least one
5 channel comprising an amplifier for (1) amplifying the input throughout a first range of sound levels and (2) compressively amplifying the input throughout a second range of sound levels, said sound level ranges having at least one end point defining at least one extreme value in its
10 corresponding range, and

 a compression threshold controller in circuit with said amplifier for adjusting the value of at least one sound level range end point.

61. The device of claim 60 wherein said sound level ranges are contiguous at a common end point, and wherein said compression threshold controller is configured to adjust the value of said common end point.

62. The device of claim 61 wherein said compression threshold controller is configured to adjust the value of

said common end point at least partially in response to changes in said input.

63. A hearing amplification device adapted to receive a sound signal, the hearing amplification device comprising:
 at least one channel configured to receive an input representative of said sound signal, said channel comprising
 5 an amplifier for compressively amplifying said input throughout a range of sound level values, and
 a controller in circuit with said amplifier for adjusting a beginning value of said range.
64. A hearing amplification device adapted to receive a sound signal, the hearing amplification device having at least one channel configured to receive an input representative of said sound signal, an IWDRC amplifier for
 5 amplifying said input, and a controller coupled to the amplifier for adjusting a threshold sound level value for compressive amplification of said input.
65. A hearing amplification device for producing an amplified sound signal from a received sound signal, said hearing amplification device comprising a analog signal processor configured to:
 5 pass an analog signal representative of said received sound signal through a nonlinear amplifier to thereby create an amplified analog signal representative of said amplified sound signal, wherein said nonlinear amplifier is configured to provide (1) linear gain for data representative of a
 10 sound signal having a sound level less than a compression threshold, (2) instantaneous compressive gain for data representative of a sound signal having a sound level greater than said compression threshold, wherein said

15 gain; and

adjust said compression threshold at least partially
in response to changes in said received sound signal.

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